



EZRA'S DILEMNA.

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# A SERMON

*Preached in Christ Church, Savannah,*

On Friday, August 21st, 1863,

BEING THE DAY OF

HUMILIATION, FASTING AND PRAYER,

Appointed by the President of the Confederate States,

BY THE

R T R E V S T E P H E N E L L I O T T, D D.,

RECTOR OF CHRIST CHURCH, AND BISHOP OF THE  
DIOCESE OF GEORGIA.

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"It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man."—Ps. 118, v. 8.

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*Savannah, Georgia :*

POWER PRESS OF GEORGE N. NICHOLS.

1863.

SAVANNAH, AUGUST 31ST, 1863.

RIGHT REVEREND AND VERY DEAR SIR :

At a meeting held in Christ Church, of the Wardens and Vestrymen of said Church, a resolution was adopted, requesting you to furnish for publication a copy of a sermon preached in Christ Church on the 21st of August inst., the day of Fasting, Humiliation and Prayer, appointed by the President of the Confederate States ; believing that such publication will not only gratify the Congregation, but be a public benefit.

W. P. HUNTER,  
WM. H. CUYLER. } *Wardens.*

HENRY D. WEED,  
W. THORNE WILLIAMS,  
JOHN WILLIAMSON,  
P. M. KOLLOCK,  
GEORGE A. GORDON,  
ROBT. HABERSHAM, } *Vestrymen.*

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SAVANNAH, SEPTEMBER 1, 1863.

*To the Wardens and Vestry of Christ Church :*

GENTLEMEN :—Yours of the 31st August, requesting me to furnish you a copy of the Sermon preached in Christ Church, Savannah, on the late Fast Day, reached me this morning.

My design in that Sermon was to recall to your recollection the very high ground which was taken by us in the beginning of this contest, and to arouse you to its maintenance under all the conditions and sacrifices which it involved, believing that “The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek him.” If I have at all succeeded in that design, my purpose has been attained.

In pursuance of your request, the Sermon has been placed in the hands of a Publisher.

Very respectfully your friend and Rector,

STEPHEN ELLIOTT.

## To the Clergy of the Diocese of Georgia.

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The President of the Confederate States, having issued his Proclamation, calling upon the people of the Confederacy—"a people who believeth that the Lord reigneth and that his overruling Providence ordereth all things—to unite in prayer and humble submission under his chastening hand, and to beseech his favor on our suffering country," and having appointed Friday, the 21st day of August, as a Day of Fasting, Humiliation and Prayer,

Now therefore I, STEPHEN ELLIOTT, Bishop of the Protestant Episcopal Church in the Diocese of Georgia, do direct the Clergy of said Diocese to call the attention of their respective Congregations to this appointment, on the Sunday preceding the Friday appointed for the Fast, urging upon them, on account of the depressed condition of the country, its observance in all due humiliation of body, mind and spirit.

And I do further direct the Clergy of the Diocese to assemble their Congregations upon the day appointed for the Fast, and to use the following service:

Morning Prayer as usual to the Psalter.

Psalms for the day—the 20th, 44th and 144th.

First Lesson—Deut. chapter 32, verses 26th to 44th.

Second Lesson—Colossians, chapter 3, to verse 18.

Use the whole Litany.

Before the General Thanksgiving introduce the Confession which precedes the Epistle for Ash Wednesday, and the following

### P R A Y E R

O most mighty Lord God, who reignest over all the kingdoms of men; who hast power to cast down and to raise up, to save thy servants and to rebuke their enemies, let thine ears be now open unto our prayers and thy merciful eyes upon our trouble and our danger. O Lord, do thou judge our cause in righteousness and mercy, and whereinsoever we have sinned against thee, make us truly sensible of it and deeply penitent for it. To us, O Lord, belongeth confusion of face as at this day, yet we are bold, because of thy long suffering and patience towards us, to pray thee to lift up once more the light of thy countenance upon us and to bless us and our arms. Save us, we humbly beseech thee, from the hand of our enemies, and send thy fear before us, that our enemies may be confounded at thy presence. The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, but our trust is in the name of the Lord our God. Hear us, O Lord, for the glory of thy name and for thy truth's sake, through Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN.

STEPHEN ELLIOTT.

Bishop of the Diocese of Georgia.



# A Sermon.

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EZRA—Chap. VIII, vv. 21, 22, 23.

21. Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river of Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance.

22. For I was ashamed to require of the King a band of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy in the way; because we had spoken unto the King, saying, The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek him: but his power and his wrath is against all them that forsake him.

23. So we fasted and besought our God for this: and he was entreated of us.

From the beginning of the revolution in which we are yet so sternly engaged, we have boldly assumed the position, that we were fighting under the shield of the Lord of Hosts, of him who "sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers." This has been our boast and our consolation. It has supported us under all our sacrifices, and has cheered us through all our days of darkness. The Psalmist never struck his harp to the animating strain—"The Lord of Hosts is with us, the God of Jacob is our refuge"—in more confident faith than we have re-echoed it. Not only has it been chanted in the sanctuaries of Christianity, but our civil rulers have recognized it in their papers of State, and our great Captains have proclaimed it from the head of their armies in victory as well as under defeat. The soldier and the statesman, the man of the sword and the man of the gown, has each borne it upon his escutcheon, and our supreme Legislative assembly has engraven it upon our national seal. All our official documents will go forth in the future, with the sacred inscription "DEO VINDICE," and announce to the world our trust and

our strength. We have not only nurtured this feeling, which seemed to come upon the Confederacy as an inspiration, within our own hearts, hugging it there as a part of our religious life—looking to it, in individual faith, as a light shining in a dark place—but we have blazoned it abroad, and are conspicuous this day before the world as a people who have taken the Lord for their God, caring for nothing so much as “for the good will of him that dwelt in the bush.” We have said not to one King only, but to all Kings within the reach of our voice—not to earthly Kings merely, but to the King of Kings—“The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek him; but his power and his wrath is against all them that forsake him.” We are bound to this declaration by the most solemn covenants both private and public, and by it must we now stand or fall. We cannot therefore require of any foreign agency—we should be ashamed to do it—“bands of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy in the way.” We have deliberately made our choice. We have taken the Lord of Hosts as our Saviour, and to him must we now turn with fasting and with prayer, and “seek of him the right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance.”

This is our only resource. We find ourselves in a condition which calls for a wisdom superior to our own, for a power greater than we can control. A day of darkness and of gloominess has unexpectedly settled down upon us, and without being able to perceive any natural causes sufficient to account for it, we are conscious that “our hands hang down and that our knees are feeble,” and that we are in peril of our cause. It is a consciousness which has come upon us from on high, and which, I firmly believe, cannot be removed by any earthly means. It must be lifted from our hearts, where it rests like a weight of lead, by the hand of the Lord which placed it there. If we look at our Government, it is as stable as ever, directed by the same clear head and sound judgment which have so well guided our affairs. If we turn to our armies, they are, in proportion to those of

our enemy, as numerous and as well appointed as they have ever been, and are commanded, with one immortal exception, by the same skilful Captains, who have so often led them to victory. If we measure our resources, they are greater, in many respects, than they have ever been before. If we examine the field of action, we stand, except in one direction, precisely where we did a year ago. What is it then, which has spread over the Confederate States, so suddenly and without any adequate reason, such a robe of darkness? Two months ago, and our prospects never looked brighter; our hearts were full of hope, and our watchmen thought that they perceived the dawn of a happier day. The cry of "all's well," had just resounded over the land, when, in a moment, all was in eclipse; dark clouds blotted out the promised light; a day of blood and slaughter and captivity rose upon us; the sound of lamentation was heard through the land; our hearts sank within us under the shock and grew as insensible as stone. Nothing like it had occurred even in the worst moments of the past. Twice before had we been defeated and depressed, but we had risen from those disasters chastened yet defiant. From this recent shock we have not rallied as we should have done, had we been stricken by the hand of man alone. We still continue most unaccountably paralysed, as inactive as if we were courting the condition of slaves. It is a visitation from God, to teach us our own weakness; it is the hiding of his countenance from our rulers, from our armies and from our people to make us understand that present victory and final success depend altogether upon his presence and his favour.

We are placed in the like dilemma in which Ezra found himself and his people. We have assumed a very grand but a very solemn position, and we cannot, without utter shame and confusion of face, abandon it, and confess that we have been trusting in vain and unfounded expectations. We are compelled to acknowledge this day, supposing our despondency to have any proper foundation, either that we ourselves have been deceived in supposing that God was on



our side, fighting for us against our enemies, or we must declare him to be a Being in whom no reliance can be placed—fickle and faithless—favoring to-day and abandoning to-morrow—puffing up with hope in the beginning, only the more surely to destroy in the end. Let us examine both these positions, and determine whether it is really necessary to lodge ourselves upon either horn of this dilemma ; whether God may not be on our side, even while we are suffering defeat and disaster ; whether he may not be firm in his purposes and persistent in his good will, even while we are provoking him to anger and forcing him to hide his face from us and from our cause. A review of the grounds upon which we claimed, for so long, the presence of God with us in our conflict, may restore our confidence, and a consideration of the reasons why he is dealing harshly with us, may lead us to repentance and a happier condition.

We believed, when we began this conflict, that the hand of God was with us, because we had the right and the true upon our side under every aspect in which we could view the case between us and our adversaries. We could not think, and we cannot yet think, that he who rules in righteousness would permit the injured and the oppressed to be overwhelmed by the tyranny of brute force, and consigned to degradation and infamy. He might try severely our fortitude—he might chasten heavily our sins—he might keep us long in the furnace of affliction, but in the end, he would deliver us and justify our trust in him. “ He is the Rock, his work is perfect ; for all his ways are judgment ; a God of truth, and without iniquity, just and right is he.”

The question of right in our movement upon general principles is settled, as between us and those who are trying to subjugate us, by that charter which was adopted by our forefathers as a declaration of civil rights, and to the observance of whose principles they pledged their lives, their fortunes and their sacred honour. This charter was not meant only for their times—it was put forth for all the world, and for all times. It has been held up continually before the nations by

our orators—it has been shaken defiantly in the face of the old governments of Europe by our statesmen—it has overturned thrones and broken up dynasties. It belongs to us to-day as fully as it belonged to our ancestors, and upon it, if we intended to be true to them and to their principles, we were bound to plant ourselves. This declaration laid it down as a fundamental principle, “that whenever any form of government becomes destructive of the ends for which governments were instituted among men, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute a new government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness.” Upon this principle, the colonies of Great Britain, then existing upon this continent, considered themselves justified in declaring themselves independent of the mother country, and they declared it with nothing like the show of right which we exhibited when we followed their example. They were colonies, and assumed their independence through the right of revolution. We were sovereign States, and asserted ours by simply resuming our rightful sovereignty. They flew to arms before any legislative action had given color to their violence, and thus their proceedings had a smack of rebellion in them. We dissolved our connection with our sister States, not after war had already dipped its foot in blood, but through Conventions, constitutionally assembled, chosen freely by the people, whose ordinances were afterwards ratified by the same people. They rushed into their conflict with the mother country with quite a half of their fellow citizens against them. We seceded with an unanimity unparalleled in such a revolution. They fought through the war of independence with many of the very best people of the Colonies against them. We have, up to this time, conducted our conflict with our people firm, determined and united. If our forefathers were right in their action, then are we right, our enemies themselves being the judges, for they had very much less to complain of than we. The wrongs of the government of Great Britain affec-

ted only their civil rights; the wrongs inflicted upon us, threatened our whole social condition. Beginning with the Missouri question we bore, I cannot say patiently, but still we bore, for forty years, wrong upon wrong, and never pronounced for separation at all hazards, until we perceived that every barrier which kept back the angry floods of fanaticism and infidelity had been broken down. All the lessons we had learned from our forefathers not only justified our action, but pointed out to us our duty. Whatever other nations may say of us, the mouth of our present adversaries is stopped upon every principle of justice and truth.

If we pass from the Declaration of Independence, from the general principles upon which our forefathers justified a change of government, to the Constitution which united us, for certain specific and limited purposes, to our sister States, we shall find that we have ever kept the right upon our side. We have never encroached upon the privileges which that Constitution guaranteed to our partners in the Union. We have always been, confessedly, the strict constructionists. We have asked no more than that the Constitution should be observed to its very letter. With a liberality which really amounted to weakness, and which received no return, we yielded point after point, and gave up territory after territory, rather than break up the government under which we had lived at least in safety. We generously stripped ourselves of our rightful heritage, to give our adversaries the means of expansion upon their own principles. Those States which are now persecuting us most implacably, were formed out of territory ceded to the government by the State of Virginia. When by our arms new domain was conquered, the acts which partitioned them into Territories and incorporated them with the United States, were clogged with provisos which excluded us from them as settlers, unless we would consent to sever the ties which bound us to our households. Liberty bills covered the statute books of the Northern States, intended to wrest our property—property most distinctly recognized and guaranteed by the Constitution—from us, if we

dared to carry it beyond a certain line. Should we be prudent enough not to carry it, societies were formed, receiving the patronage and encouragement of many of the best people of the North, whose business it was, through secret agents sent among us and living upon our trustful hospitality, to entice our slaves away from their homes, and to receive and protect them until they could be placed beyond the reach of their masters. An armed raid was arranged and carried out against us, which was expected to be accompanied by insurrection and murder and rapine. When its leaders were punished, their memories were held sacred, and their ashes glorified. Against all this we used every constitutional mode of resistance. We appealed to the promises of their forefathers, to the memories of the past, to the better feelings of the present. All was in vain. The conservative portion of the North either could not or would not restrain these aggressions. At last we determined to strike for our homes and for our firesides, but not until a party had been organized and was triumphant, which threatened to overturn our whole domestic and social life. Which party was right in all this? The Northern States in their persistent aggressions, or we in our resistance? Can any man, with any sense of justice, hesitate how to decide? What else could we do? Could we permit every thing that made life valuable to be torn from us, and we the while stand mute and impassive? We did what every high-minded people would have done, transferred the question from the courts of Earth to the courts of Heaven, and committed our cause to him who reigneth in righteousness.

If we go yet a step further, we shall see, that as between us and our adversaries, even admitting all their positions, we still had the right with us. Supposing slavery (for I argue now upon the hypothesis of our adversaries) to have been a wrong to the slave and an evil to the country, I would ask, who did the wrong and who bears the evil? Where did these slaves come from and who brought them here? They came from their native haunts, brought here by the forefathers

either of those very men who are fighting this battle with us, or of those who are standing coldly by, seeing us cut each other's throats. These slaves were imposed upon us—imposed upon us, in many cases, against our wills—imposed upon us just so long as it was profitable for those hypocrites to bring them here. And now when they have become interwoven with our whole social life, forming a part of our representation, of our prosperity, of our habits, of our manners, of our affections, all these ties are to be rudely broken asunder, not at our will or in our own time, but at the will and in the appointed time of those who forced this evil upon us. Were our people required, upon any principle of equity, to submit to be the shuttle-cocks of these contemptible gamesters? to be the tools of such mock philanthropy and such real wickedness? Was this our breeding? Was this the spirit which Burke foreshadowed as the temper of the slaveholder? Have they who committed the wrong and took money for it—aye, received their full bond, flesh and all—the right, whether in the sight of man or God, to dictate to us, who have paid the bond and rescued the poor savages from their greedy and bloody grasp and made men and christians of them? And who bears the evil, as they have been pleased to term it? We bear it, and have borne it, and have endeavored to turn it into a blessing, and have many of us been martyrs in its cause. At that day of terrible judgment, when the secrets of all hearts shall be disclosed, many will stand before God, who shall be able to show that they have sacrificed feelings dearer than life itself for the benefit of these very slaves, who have spent days of toil and nights of prayer to understand what was best for their temporal and eternal state. Many, very many, I know, have been insensible to their duty and have neglected the great trust committed to their charge, and for this, punishment has fallen upon us, but many have acquitted their consciences before God. Let their increase attest their general comfort! Let their change from the tattooed savage to the well-bred courteous menial, bear witness to their culture! Let their

quiet subordination thro' all this fierce conflict speak trumpet-tongued to the world of their treatment. Let the numbers who flock to the table of the Lord attest to the nations the missionary work which is going on amongst them. Here we are, engaged in one of the bloodiest wars on record, pressed on every hand, with the enemy at our very doors, inviting them, alluring them, tempting them, deceiving them, and yet who wait upon us morning and night? Who keep the keys of our houses and who nurse and tend upon our children? Who cook the food we eat and minister to all our necessary wants? These very slaves! And does the head of any one of us rest less easily upon his pillow? Does any one tremble as he sees his little ones, dearer to him than life, nestled in their bosoms and sung to sleep with their lullabys? Does any one require a taster of his food, an analyser of his drink? What does all this mean? How does it harmonize with the ground assumed by our enemies, that we are inflicting upon these people a great natural and moral wrong? It means, that upon the score of humanity, there is no reason for this cruel invasion. It means that we are guiltless of the insulting and calumnious charges which have been laid at our doors. It means that we have been not only masters to these people, but so far as circumstances have permitted us, that we have been friends and instructors. It means that all the blood which has been shed—that all the misery which has been endured—that all the desolation which has been visited upon our land—that all the curse which is laid up in the future, whether for the white race or the black race, is upon our enemies, and that God will require it at their hands.

But besides having reasons like these, depending upon the righteousness of our cause, to believe that God was with us, we had, likewise, another ground of hope arising out of the character and motives of those who were warring against us. We had said in the words which Ezra put into the mouth of his people, not only that “the hand of God is upon all them for good that seek him,” but “his power and wrath is against

all them that forsake him," and we felt no doubt that the party, which had formed and was directing this crusade against us, had grown up out of elements unchristian and really atheistic. Pretending to a peculiar philanthropy, it was a philanthropy opposed alike to the word and the will of God. Instead of believing in the curse of God upon sin, which curse manifested itself in poverty, in suffering, in slavery, in a thousand forms which made the world as miserable as it is, they determined that human effort could remove them all. Instead of bowing before the word of God, which said "the poor shall never cease out of the land;" instead of submitting to the Divine decree imposed upon Adam and his posterity, "Cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life;" instead of acquiescing in the triple curse upon the descendants of Ham. "And he said, cursed be Canaan, a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren. And he said, Blessed be the Lord God of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant. God shall enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant," they turned their rage against the word of God, and covered it all over with ridicule and with abuse. Catching the echo of the French revolution, they set up liberty, equality, fraternity, as their idols, and virtually dethroned the God of the Bible. They did not work that the evils of social life might fade out quietly under the influence of Christianity, but they defied God, because there were any social evils at all. They were ready, in their fanatical worship of these terrible delusions—delusions made more terrible than ever because of the immense developments of physical science and material prosperity—to blot out all the records of Divine inspiration, should they be found in opposition to their human conclusions. It was not Truth which led them on, it was Passion. It was not the path of pure morality which they were treading; it was the track of a lawless licentiousness, which led over the ruins and ashes of the altar and the fireside. At home, its fruits have been fraud, corruption, unbelief, falsehood, free

love. Abroad, wherever their arms have been victorious, those fruits have been theft, rapine, cruelty, fornication, desolation. The face of this party was for a time covered with a silver vail, but the vail has been lifted and lo, the hideous features of the false Prophet! It carried, for a time, the semblance of wisdom, for it developed immense material prosperity, but has proved itself to be "the wisdom which descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish." Can God be with a cause, engendered out of such materials, led on by such Prophets and Apostles? Will he permit crime, falsehood, wickedness, unmercifulness, to be triumphant in the end? Will his power be with those who have forsaken him, and trampled upon his word and his immutable morality? Impossible; he is only biding his time while he chastens us for our sins and tries our faith, and while he ripens them for slaughter and vengeance.

Did any of us ever doubt, in the first years of this conflict, that God was on our side? Did not the whole land resound with one universal shout of thanksgiving and of praise, as event after event plainly indicated God's presence with us? Did we not, in solemn festival, send up our acknowledgement of gratitude, of devotion, of unswerving faith? Did we not proclaim it from the house tops, that our God was manifesting himself to us almost as palpably as he had done to his own chosen people? The remarkable unanimity with which the seceding States came out of the Union—the harmony with which a new and permanent Constitution was adopted—the skill with which vexed questions were avoided, and discordant elements brought into combination—the recognition of God as our Lord in the face of all the world, were assumed, on all hands, as tokens of the presence of his Spirit in our Councils and of his good will towards the rising Government. And as with our civil affairs so with our military affairs. The first victory at Manassas, when God smote that proud army with His fear, and gave us time to gather our resources and discipline our armies for the future—the capture of Norfolk, which sup-



plied us with heavy artillery, while we were preparing to manufacture it for ourselves—the supplies of arms and of ammunition, which came in from abroad, often at the most propitious moment, to enable us to sustain the struggle, until we could procure them for ourselves—the unaccountable delays in the movements of our enemies, when promptness and decision might have overwhelmed us—the frequent changes of their Generals at times the most critical for us—the expiration of the term of service of their troops, happening often when their armies most needed their presence—the marvellous successes of our little Navy, coming to us just when our hearts were most in want of comfort and hope—all these and a thousand minuter circumstances which were deeply felt when they occurred, were all taken to our bosoms and hugged there as precious proofs that God was with us of a truth. They were to us what the miracles at the Red Sea and in the wilderness were to the Israelites. Have we forgotten all these things? Have they faded from our hearts and from our memories because of a few reverses? Are we faithless the moment that God withdraws himself for a little while from us? O fools and slow of heart to believe! “God is not a man, that he should lie, neither the son of man, that he should repent: Hath he said and shall He not do it? or hath He spoken and shall He not make it good?” And how could He more plainly have spoken, than by the acts of his Spirit and of his Providence which we have just recalled to your minds. Even while he was threatening judgment against the Israelites, his comforting words were “For I am the Lord, I change not; therefore ye sons of Jacob are not consumed.”

Why then, you will ask, if God is so clearly on our side, are we so sorely pressed and made to bleed at every pore? Why do our enemies triumph over us, and spoil our homes and desolate our hearth stones? Why are our young men smitten and our houses filled with lamentation? Why does the widow send up her wail before the Lord and why does the orphan weep because he is fatherless? Why are all faces

filled with anxiety and every brow with care? My hearers, it requires no research, nor any ingenuity to answer this question. Our Bibles answer it very directly and very plainly. What you suppose hard of reconcilement, was asked by the people of Israel thousands of years ago, and has been asked ever since by the people of God under whatever dispensation and in whatever condition. Did not Moses say, when he was recapitulating to the Israelites the wonders of God in their behalf, "For what nation is there so great, who hath God so nigh unto them as the Lord your God is in all things that we call upon him for?" And yet this did not hinder but that the Israelites were discomfited in battle, were slain by the sword, were visited with pestilence, were often reduced to very great straits and extremities. Those of whom God is intending to make a nation to do his work upon earth, are precisely those whom he tries most severely. His purpose is to give them not merely victory, but character; not only independence, but righteousness; not peace alone, but the will to do good, after peace shall have been established. His plan, when his hand is upon a people for good, is to discipline as well as to support—to support through discipline, for moral discipline, like military discipline, gives strength and power. His severity goes along with his goodness; he so intermingles them that the one may temper the other and keep down effeminacy and presumption. If you suppose, because God is with you, that you are to run on from victory to victory, without any regard to their moral effect upon you, you will bring upon yourselves much bitter disappointment. The law which God has established for nations as well as for individuals, that any high standard of virtue—virtue which may be relied upon to withstand temptation and to resist corruption—must be gained through the discipline of suffering, is always inflexibly worked out.

When we assume the ground that God has taken us, in spite of our sins, under his especial care and guardianship, we must prepare ourselves to carry on this struggle under the conditions which this sacred relationship involves. We

have made our choice before the world, boasting that the Lord is our God—not only boasting of it, but until lately rejoicing in it—and we believe that he has graciously accepted our proffered allegiance. We have said “The hand of the Lord our God is upon all them for good that seek him,” and shall we faint and be bewildered, and know not where to turn, the instant we encounter difficulties in the way? Shall we be looking to the right hand and to the left, with trembling limbs and countenances of dismay, when we have boasted to the world that we have such an ally as the Lord of Hosts? Ezra was ashamed, when he had made such an utterance to Artaxerxes, to require of him a band of soldiers and horsemen to help him and his against the enemy in the way. What did he? He proclaimed a fast at the river of Ahava, that he and his might afflict themselves before their God to seek of him a right way for them, and for their little ones, and for all their substance. That was his course; a faithful and a consistent one, and it had its reward, as faithfulness and consistency always will, of entire success. The Lord turned his face once more upon them and showed them that right way which they sought after. “So we fasted,” is his simple and beautiful language, “and besought our God for this; and he was entreated of us.”

Most surely do we need, my hearers, at this moment, to have the right way pointed out to us—“the right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance.” We are sadly out of the way. We have lost sight of the land marks which directed us so safely upon our first setting out. We seem to have forgotten the resolution with which we entered upon this journey towards the promised land of our national independence—the resolution to suffer anything and to lose everything rather than fail in our purpose. We appear to have abated the enthusiasm which swept everything before it in the outset—which hurried our sons to the field, our wives and daughters to the hospitals, ourselves to any and every work which we could undertake for the advancement of the cause. We have grown apathetic, if not indifferent.

We are murmuring and complaining, and some are beginning to ask of our leaders "And wherefore hath the Lord brought us unto this land, to fall by the sword, that our wives and our children should be a prey? were it not better for us to return into Egypt?" What shall we do? How are we once again to regain our lost devotedness and to string ourselves afresh for the duties and the sacrifices which are before us? We must follow the example of Ezra. We must afflict ourselves before our God—we must fast and beseech the Lord to give us true repentance and grace to do the first works.

"In the early history of the Roman Republic, there yawned in the centre of the Forum a deep and dark abyss—an abyss that had opened of its own accord, and had hourly grown wider and wider and threatened to engulf all Rome. The Chief Augur, upon secret consultation with the Senate, uttered these solemn words:

"People of Rome! a heavy doom hangs over our beloved city! The wrath of the Gods has been kindled against you; and in that black abyss you behold its token. See! it gapes with greedy jaws to swallow Rome, and each hour that it remains unclosed, will it become wider and wider, till domestic hearth, sacred altar, Senate house, Capitol, all shall be engulfed."

"Yet may the doom be averted by a fitting oblation. The angry Deities demand a sacrifice—a sacrifice of that, whatsoever it be, which is the most precious of sublunary things. They have not intimated to us what is the sacrifice they demand; that is left to your own judgment and your own faith.

"Choose ye that which ye deem most valuable, and cast it unreluctantly into this gulf. If the sacrifice be acceptable, the chasm will close; if it continues open, seek ye, by a further offering to propitiate the Deities. Is there one, O Romans, who would hesitate a moment to give his best, his most valued, nay all he possesses for his fellow citizens and his country? Shall Rome pass away ere she is out of her

infancy, because ye selfishly love aught more than Rome ? Or shall she endeavour to fulfil a glorious destiny, purchased by the generous sacrifice of her sons ?”

“The augur had scarcely ceased, when he was answered by an unanimous and animated shout—Rome ! Rome !! let her be perpetual. ”

“Down into the abyss were poured showers of glittering coin, the hoarded wealth of the citizens. But the abyss closed not ; money was too cheap a sacrifice for such a blessing. ”

“Next advanced the matrons of Rome in regular order, each bearing the caskets in which were contained her most valued ornaments and her most precious jewels. And as they passed, they sang a solemn chant and cast into the abyss their sparkling gems. One flash of light and they were gone. But the abyss closed not ; Gems were too cheap a sacrifice for such a blessing. ”

“There was a dead silence, and a troubled eye was fixed upon that greedy abyss, that had received so much and yet demanded more. ”

“Suddenly a shout arose upon the outskirts of the crowd. The tramp of a steed was heard ; the throng gave way and a noble warrior dashed towards the abyss, reined up his steed and with a motion of his spear commanded silence. ”

“Romans,” said Curtius, “ye have offered sacrifice of your possessions, of your treasures, of your affections, but who has offered the sacrifice of self ? Trust me, Romans, it is the sacrifice of self that is the most precious. ”

“With these words, rider and steed plunged into the unfathomable abyss. There was a moment of dreadful feeling—a moment that seemed an age. Slowly the abyss closed ; the self sacrifice was received, and Rome was delivered. ”

Has not this legend of ancient Rome, thus graphically described by an English writer, a deep and rich moral for us at this critical moment ! We have freely cast into the black abyss of this war our wealth, our treasures, our children, but

have we sacrificed self? Have we determined to give up everything, if need be, for the cause of our country; to lay down upon its altar our private and personal griefs; to overcome our prejudices, to forget our enmities, to put under foot our jealousies? Have we resolved to bear all things from man or God, neglect, humiliation, suffering, rather than be a hindrance in the way of success? It is far easier to cast into this gulf such things as property, money, treasures, gems, and even sons, than it is to strip ourselves of vanity, of self-conceit, of pride of opinion, of ambition, of evil habits, of those things which make up our identity. SELF! SELF!! in how many subtle, deceitful guises does it dress itself! under how many high sounding names does it mask itself! How terrible it is to think that the like features of a noble nature, the deep earnestness, the heroic self-denial, the labor night and day, the intense concentration, can arise from impulses so opposite, and that patriotism, one of the noblest, and selfishness one of the meanest motives, have but the same machinery to work with. And yet so it is. The impulse which would make a man a hero, a martyr, a being to live in his country's heart forever, is as wide apart from that which makes him a selfish creature, living within himself and for himself, with no aspirations higher than his own interests or his own wants, as is inspiration from Heaven and cunning from earth, and yet the instruments of their work are strikingly alike, so strikingly as to make not only others, but ourselves, unable to distinguish them. It is very often by their fruits only—the one reaping in the end honour, admiration, the world's immortality; the other, the ashes of all their expectations—that we can finally separate the wheat from the chaff, the pure gold from the worthless dross.

In turning ourselves, therefore to God in fasting and prayer, let us truly humble ourselves and beseech Him to show us our own hearts and to convict us especially of those sins which are offensive to him and which have placed us in the wrong way. There should be great searchings of heart to-day. From the President of the Confederate States, who

now occupies, for a time, the most responsible position in the world, to the humblest person who is involved in their destiny, each one of us should examine himself and find out, if possible, wherein he has offended God and turned away his face from us. Let us not be looking at and criticising others; let each one look at himself. We shall find sins enough in ourselves to mourn over, without laying all the blame upon our neighbour's doings. Let the spirit of the Publican—"God be merciful to me a sinner" be with us rather than that of the Pharisee which is now so common; "I thank thee, O God, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this Publican." My pride of opinion, if I be one in authority, may be doing as much harm to the cause, both with man and God, as another man's covetousness. My vanity and self-conceit may work as much mischief, if I be in a position to make them felt, as your love of ease or your indifference to the cause. It is the aggregate of sinfulness that is working our ruin; that is eating out the heart and spirit of the cause, eating it out naturally and consequentially, for one sin leads inevitably to another. The confidence which grew out of continued victory led to presumption and presumption led to security and the feeling of security begat within the community the desire of wealth, which circumstances seemed to place within every man's grasp. And this making haste to be rich took rapid possession of the minds and hearts of the whole people. Commencing with those who were legitimately engaged in commerce and trade, it soon extended to the farming interests of the country and from them was communicated to the soldier in the camp and the officer in the garrison. Every man became anxious to take part in this game which was to enrich himself, without seeing that it would, most certainly, ruin his country. Men were seen skulking in every way to avoid service in the army, not from cowardice, not from any doubt about the value of the conflict or the certainty of its success, but that they might be at liberty to mingle in this mad hunt after money. Feeble substitutes were put in

the place of able bodied men ; hundreds sought exemption upon pleas which they would never have dreamed to offer except under the influence of this all-pervading madness, and the soldier, who had retained his early enthusiasm and was ready to sacrifice every thing for the cause, grew dissatisfied when he perceived that he was to bear and to suffer, while others, as able-bodied as himself and as deeply interested in the struggle, remained at home to speculate and grow rich upon his endurance and his sufferings. Just as victory was foreshadowed at the beginning in the earnestness of every heart, in the devotion of every spirit, in the one concentrated idea of victory and independence, so was defeat just as plainly foreshadowed in the distraction of the public mind, in the struggle which rapidly grew up between the administration and the people, in the complaining and the murmuring against the inefficiency of the armies, which was but the natural result of the demoralization of the country. And man could not arrest it. He might force the body, but he could not give the spirit. He might carry the man to the camp, but he could not impart the dash which distinguishes him whose heart is in the work. What we should now ask of God is, that he would revive within us those qualities of mind and of heart—so near akin to the graces of the spirit—which qualify us for carrying on our conflict successfully, earnestness, singleness of purpose, honesty, integrity. The whole people need to be aroused and the government should take the lead, under God, in doing it. The chord of sympathy which vibrated so harmoniously in the past, must be touched anew. This is not a warfare which can be coldly left to the Government and the army ; it is the cause, emphatically, of the whole nation—of every man, woman and child in the Confederacy. In vain are conscriptions and impressments ; in vain are proclamations and fastings, unless after we shall have fasted and prayed, we use means to rekindle the sacred fire of patriotism which burned so vividly in the outburst of this revolution. Where is the orator ? Where is the statesman ? Where are the



voices which, like a trumpet's blast, led on the soldier to the field of glory—of glory, because the field of duty? They are all mute; some silent in death, some wrapped in inglorious ease. Is this the time for him who has the divine gift of eloquence to keep it pent within his own burning bosom? Is this an hour when any man, who can sway his fellow men, who can enkindle his hope with lips touched with a live coal from off the altar, or excite his fears with the dark shadows of coming events, should leave his country and his country's hopes to drift to ruin without one effort to arrest the misery? Where are the people themselves? Where is that influence of the multitude which is so terrible for evil, so powerful for good? Where is the low sweet voice of woman which has mingled so harmoniously thro' all this tumult with the clangor of the trumpet and the clash of arms? Why is it unheard? Has grief frozen it within her bosom or has terror hushed it into silence? Awake to the reality of things and arouse yourselves, children of the sun, or God's hand will not be with you. "Wherefore criest thou unto me," said the Lord to Moses, when he and his people were hedged up among the mountains, with the fierce Egyptians in their rear, and the deep waters of the red sea before them, "speak unto the children of Israel that they go forward."

Forward, my hearers, forward, with our shields locked and our trust in God, is our only movement now. It is too late even to go backward. We might have gone backward a year ago, when our armies were victoriously thundering at the gates of Washington and were keeping at successful bay the Hessians of the West, had we been content to bear humiliation for ourselves and degradation for our children. But even that is no longer left us. It is now victory or unconditional submission; submission not to the conservative and christian people of the North, but to a party of infidel fanatics, with an army of needy and greedy soldiers at their backs. Who shall be able to restrain them in their hour of victory? When that moment approaches, when the danger shall seem to be over and the spoils are ready to be divided,

every outlaw will rush to fill their ranks, every adventurer will hasten to swell their legions, and they will sweep down upon the South as the hosts of Attila did upon the fertile fields of Italy. And shall you find in defeat that mercy which you did not find in victory? You may slumber now, but you will awake to a fearful reality. You may lie upon your beds of ease and dream that when it is all over, you will be welcomed back to all the privileges and immunities of greasy citizens, but how terrible will be your disappointment! You will have an ignoble home, overrun by hordes of insolent slaves and rapacious soldiers. You will wear the badge of a conquered race, Pariahs among your fellow creatures, yourselves degraded, your delicate wives and gentle children thrust down to menial service, insulted perhaps dishonored. Think you that these victorious hordes, made up in large part of the sweepings of Europe, will leave you any thing? As well might the lamb expect mercy from the wolf. Power, which is checked and fettered by a doubtful contest, is very different from power victorious, triumphant and irresponsible. The friends whom you have known and loved at the North; who have sympathized with you in your trials and to whom you might have looked for comfort and protection, will have enough to do then to take care of themselves. The surges that sweep over us, will carry them away in its reflux tide. Oh! for the tongue of a Prophet to paint for you what is before you, unless you repent and turn to the Lord and realize that "His hand is upon all them for good that seek him." The language of Scripture is alone adequate to describe it—"The earth mourneth and languisheth: Lebanon is ashamed and hewn down: Sharon is like a wilderness. They that did feed delicately are desolate in the streets: they that were brought up in scarlet embrace dung-hills. They ravished the women in Zion and the maids in the cities of Judah. They took the young men to grind, and the children fell under the wood. The joy of our heart is ceased; our dance is turned into mourning. The crown is fallen from our head: wo unto us that we have sinned."

Let us turn then this day to the Lord our God with all our heart and soul and mind, believing that His hand is upon all them for good that seek him, trusting that He will shew us the right way for us and for our little ones, and for all our substance. Let our prayer be that which Milton offered against the enemies of his country—"Let them all take counsel together and let it come to nought ; let them decree and do thou cancel it ; let them gather themselves and be scattered ; let them embattle themselves and be broken ; let them embattle and be broken, for thou art with us."

